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(1844-1848)**

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W. M. THACKERAY'S LITERARY CRITICISM
IN THE MORNING CHRONICLE (1844 — 1848)

It is thanks to Gordon N. Ray, the established American authority on Thackeray, that students of the life and work of this outstanding English critical realist have now available a series of his hitherto unknown newspaper contributions, which appeared in the *Morning Chronicle* between 1844 and 1848. Gordon N. Ray identified these noteworthy papers for the first time in his edition of Thackeray's correspondence¹ and has now reprinted them in one volume entitled *William Makepeace Thackeray: Contributions to the Morning Chronicle*,² in which all writing for this magazine so far identifiable as Thackeray's is collected (besides thirty-one contributions unearthed by Ray it contains four papers previously attributed to Thackeray and partly reprinted by other Thackerayan research workers).³ The result of Ray's untiring research work is very revealing to all lovers of Thackeray, for the carefully edited and annotated volume most convincingly shows that Thackeray's association with the *Morning Chronicle* was much more fruitful in many respects than it has hitherto been supposed. It is indeed rather surprising to Thackerayan research workers living outside England that the papers identified by Ray had been overlooked by other gleaners of Thackeray's journalism and had lain for such a long time in oblivion, even if the difficulties connected with their identification, so convincingly displayed by Ray in his introduction, cannot be ignored. As we see it, at least, Thackeray's contributions to this magazine add considerably to our general knowledge of Thackeray the reviewer and critic and enable us to come to a better understanding of his views of literature and art during the crucial period of his development, when his outlook on life was beginning to assume its definite shape under the strong impact of the stormy events of Chartism, the period during which he found his true vein in literature and in which his art was rapidly developing to culminate in the triumph of *Vanity Fair*.

I.

The range of Thackeray's *Morning Chronicle* contributions is wide and their interest manifold. They fall into three groups: political reports, art criticisms and book reviews, which may be again sub-divided into reviews

of non-fictional works and reviews of fiction. All reveal Thackeray's perfect acquaintance with contemporary English life, literature and the fine arts, with the history of his country and its cultural tradition, and bear witness to his deep interest in political and social problems of his time.

Even if Thackeray's political reports do not directly concern the purpose of this article, they are worth noticing here at least summarily, for they show us Thackeray in a new light — as a reporter of Chartist meetings. It has been of course familiar since the edition of his complete correspondence that he reported at least two meetings of the Chartists in 1848⁴ but these reports were not accessible to the students of Thackeray's life and work living outside England, since they lay buried in the old files of the magazine. Now that we have them in hand at last it is obvious that they are valuable as evidences of Thackeray's response to his direct contact with the great social movement of his time. If they do not reveal any surprising and novel facts, they at least add to our knowledge of his frame of mind shortly before the noticeable change which took place in him in 1848, after the defeat of Chartism in England and revolution on the Continent, a change which is of momentous importance in the ensuing development of his art and also of his criticism (there is material for a full-length study concerning this change, which cannot be treated here).

A fact familiar from Thackeray's letters, also mentioned by Ray in his introduction, is that at the beginning of his *Morning Chronicle* association Thackeray had political aspirations and aimed at distinguishing himself on the staff as a political writer and reporter. Since for some years past he had been becoming more and more dissatisfied with the conservative political programme of the magazines to which he contributed, as Ray revealed in the first volume of his recent biography,⁵ Thackeray welcomed the new opportunity afforded him by the liberal politics of the *Morning Chronicle* for venting his political opinions, in the early 1840s developing towards left-wing bourgeois radicalism. The new periodical connection happened to strengthen the influences which then operated upon Thackeray — that of Chartism, of the agitation for the Repeal of the Corn Laws, of the general revolutionary mood of the working masses — by enabling him to become more closely acquainted with the distress of the English people and their struggle from his own personal experience (another connection which gave him this direct contact was that with *Punch*). The *Morning Chronicle* in the middle and towards the end of the 1840s paid much attention to the living conditions of the working people of England; Kathleen Tillotson, for instance, points out that the articles published in this magazine in 1848–1849 “were noted as confirming the disclosures of Kingsley”⁶ in his novels *Yeast* and *Alton Locke*. Also Thackeray mentions in a passing comment in *Punch* that the writers for the *Morning Chronicle* were being given commissions to report “upon the state of our poor in London” and from this *terra incognita* brought back “a picture of human life so wonderful, so awful, so piteous and pathetic, so exciting and terrible, that readers of romances own they never read anything like to it; and that the griefs, struggles, strange adventures here depicted exceed anything that any of us could imagine”.⁷ It is also well known that Thackeray was much interested in the revolutionary events of 1848 on the Continent and the response to them in England: in 1848 and

the years immediately following he read books dealing with contemporary political, economic and social problems, such as Louis Blanc's *De l'Organisation du travail* and Kingsley's novels, while he corresponded regularly with his mother about the revolutionary happenings in France.⁸ His interest was to a great extent motivated by his fear of similar happenings in England, for if his political views developed to the left at the beginning of the 1840s, as the decade approached its close they were more and more coloured by his fear of revolution and reluctance to accept it as the solution of contemporary abuses. Led both by his interest in Chartism and by his fear of it, he anxiously observed the last desperate upheaval of this movement in 1848 and welcomed the opportunity of reporting the Chartist meetings, hoping to learn more about the movement from direct contact.

The result of this are his two reports of two important meetings of the Chartists, the meeting on Kennington Common of 13th March 1848, the purpose of which was to adopt a congratulatory address to the French Republicans, and the meeting held on the following day in the Literary Institution in John Street, Tottenham Court Road, for the purpose of receiving the deputation entrusted with the congratulatory address and hearing their report. These are the only political papers which the editor could safely attribute to Thackeray by the help of the above quoted direct references in his letters, from among the numerous contributions dealing with politics published in the *Morning Chronicle* during the period when Thackeray was its regular contributor. As his correspondence shows, Thackeray wrote for the magazine other contributions dealing with political events and affairs and probably also further reports of Chartist meetings but none can be as yet identified as his, as Ray points out, for want of such specific evidence and owing to lack of personal touch. Indeed, want of the distinct stamp of Thackeray's personality can be also observed in his two Chartist reports and this fact detracts somewhat from the value these papers possess for the biographers of Thackeray. He appears in these papers as a competent reporter, but his account of the proceedings is uncommitted and detached. Nevertheless one aspect of his outlook, very typical for his development in 1848, may be traced even here: his fear of any disturbances of order motivated by his fear of revolution. He expresses his satisfaction that the proceedings of both the meetings he reports were orderly and the assemblages well-conducted and obviously prefers these relatively tame meetings to such disturbances of order as those which took place in Trafalgar Square on 6th March during the well-known dispelled demonstration, which he also mentions. The reports also witness to his rather disdainful attitude to Chartism, for he speaks with slight contempt about "the 'thrice told tale' of the Chartists" which is, as he is convinced, generally "dull, tame, and uninteresting" (*Contributions*, [cited hereafter as C.], p. 193). But even if Thackeray stands out in his Chartist reports as a cool observer and a non-combatant, the influence of the meetings he attended upon his mind was profound. This is not revealed so much by his reports, as by his diary of March 1848, in which he wrote:

"Wrote an article on the Kennington meeting for M. C. . . . I tried in vain to convince the fine folks at Mrs. Fox's that revolution was upon us: that we were

wicked in our scorn of the people. They all thought there was poverty & discomfort to be sure, but that they were pretty good in themselves; that powder & liveries were very decent & proper though certainly absurd — the footmen themselves would not give them up C. V. said — Why, the gladiators at Rome were proud of their profession, & their masters saw nothing wicked in it.”⁹

As the Soviet literary historian A. A. Elistratova shows, this record is interesting in many aspects and is of great importance for a correct evaluation of Thackeray’s attitude to the crucial problems raised in England by Chartism:

“The comparison of the “free” post-reform bourgeois England of the 1840s to slave-driving Rome is in itself an eloquent tribute to Thackeray’s penetration in distrusting the bourgeois social order, celebrated by Liberals as the norm and ideal of social-historical development. Very significant is also the allusion to be read between the lines that the fate of ancient Rome may also be waiting for England. The whole record however is pervaded by bitterness to a greater extent than by hope. These few lines of the diary call up before us as in a mirror the drama of the life of the writer, who understood the criminality and immorality of property-owning society and still in spite of this recognized himself as part of this society. Towering like a titan above the pygmies of the “highest world” he still tries to appeal to their sleeping conscience, although he himself grasps the vanity of these attempts.”¹⁰

Even if Thackeray’s diary and letters are more revealing than his Chartist reports as far as his political development is concerned, the importance of the latter among his contributions of 1848 must not be overlooked. If we view them from the angle suggested above we cannot help regretting that the editor did not succeed in unearthing more of them, although he is himself convinced that political reports even from Thackeray’s hand “would today be of little interest” (C., Introduction, p. xii). It is true that Thackeray’s political articles never belonged to his best contributions and that the loss is not so great as it would be if some of his works of fiction, or book reviews and art criticisms had not come down to us. But there can be no doubt that any further light thrown upon the development of Thackeray’s world outlook and political views, indeed upon any other aspect of his personality, would certainly be appreciated and welcomed by all serious students of his life and mind.

Thackeray himself, whose attitude to his own work had always been critical, was not contented with his political reports, soon admitted that politics were not his true vein¹¹ and turned his attention to art criticism and book reviews. In his art criticism he continued along the lines previously and simultaneously followed in *Fraser’s Magazine*. His reports of exhibitions and his appreciation of individual pictures¹² are not without their own intrinsic interest and help us — as his art criticisms always do — to come to a deeper understanding of his conception of literature. Indeed, in Thackeray’s case the help his art criticisms offer us is very considerable, for his approach to the picture evaluated had always been, as George Saintsbury pointed out, from the so-called “literary” point of view: he always wished to find what was to him the poetry of the picture he was describing. This characteristic approach of his may be also traced in his *Morning Chronicle* art criticism. As in his Fraserian walks through galleries

and exhibitions here too he likes to illustrate his description of a picture by apt and clever analogies from literature, and his brilliant word painting, which bears witness to his great descriptive power, is nearly always successful in recreating for the reader the poetry and general atmosphere of the picture and its aesthetic effect upon the onlooker. There is another common trait which his criticisms of pictures and books possess, and which reveals how closely related to each other literature and the fine arts were in his eyes. Both in his appreciation of literary works and works of art, he is guided by the principles of realistic aesthetics: as far as painting is concerned, the basic article of his faith and his main critical standard is a principle from which he never swerves, namely that the painter should copy "directly from nature" (C., p. 138). This does not mean however that he was ready to accept a copy of nature which would be an exact, photographic reproduction. He complains that

"the painters do not generally attempt what is called the highest species of art, and content themselves with depicting nature as they find her, and trusting to the poetry and charms of the scenes which they copy, rather than to their own powers of invention, and representing ideal beauty" (C., p. 27).

Viewing the evaluated pictures from this perspective he assesses highly those of them which possess dramatic and poetical power, feeling, pathos or humour and the themes of which are "stirring and novel" (C., p. 30) and prefers them to those representing still life and depicting conventional themes. Besides the subject of the picture, which Thackeray always examines in detail, he also takes notice of the painter's technique and, himself by no means an amateur in painting, is even able to give the painters some useful hints as to the technical means by which their faults could be avoided.¹³

In our opinion Thackeray's *Morning Chronicle* art criticisms are approximately upon the same level as those published in *Fraser's Magazine* (although, as the *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer of Ray's edition points out, "Titmarsh used to be more carefree and comical on these occasions")¹⁴ and their best passages deserve to be praised no less warmly than were the Fraserian by George Saintsbury.¹⁵

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The book reviews which Thackeray wrote for the *Morning Chronicle* display very convincingly the wide range of his criticism, even if it had not considerably expanded since the beginning of his critical practice. He pays attention especially to fiction, and that to a larger extent than before, and to works of his personal interest, such as travel-books, biographical and autobiographical works, books on history, gastronomy, and architecture. These critical papers possess a considerable general interest for the student of Thackeray's life, mind, and work. If in his works of fiction Thackeray kept silent for the most part, or at least did not expressly speak about the political, social, scientific, religious and other problems which were much under discussion at his time, in his book reviews, as Gordon N. Ray points out, he "has his word, and it is usually an epigram, on most of the leading

issues of the day" (C., Intr., p. xix.). We recognize his familiar idiosyncrasies, such as his deep interest in the 18th century England, his love for pantomimes and fairy-tales, his interest in gastronomy, his negative attitude to the English system of education etc., and his opinions about problems which occupied his mind in the more important field of his activity, in writing fiction. Thus it is not surprising that between 1844 and 1846, when his Irish tour of 1842 was still fresh in his memory and his mind full of the thoughts connected with the writing of *Barry Lyndon*, the Irish question stood in the centre of his interest. During those two years he wrote four reviews of books dealing with the contemporary situation in Ireland, or with the history of that oppressed country (Venedey's *Ireland*, 16 March 1844, Madden's *Ireland and its Rulers since 1829*, 20 March 1844, D'Arlincourt's *Three Kingdoms*, 14 April 1844, and Moore's *History of Ireland; from the Earliest Kings of that Realm down to its last Chief*, 20 August 1846). The reviews display his wide knowledge of the Irish national problem, bear witness to his acquaintance with literature dealing with it and to his serious and responsible attitude towards it. The Irish question should be, as he emphasizes, "a matter of historical research" and should never be treated "as a romance" (C., p. 2) as for example in Venedey's travel-book. Of the four books on Irish themes Thackeray most highly appreciates Moore's history, which is in his opinion

"a frightful document as against ourselves — one of the most melancholy stories in the whole world of insolence, rapine, brutal, endless persecution on the part of the English master; of manly resistance, or savage revenge and cunning, or plaintive submission, all equally hopeless and unavailing to the miserable victim." (C., p. 164).

The cruel and selfish colonial policy of "the noble English lords" towards Ireland, which is so remarkably well revealed in Moore's history, is — in Thackeray's opinion — typical especially of the Middle Ages, but marks "almost up to the last twenty years, the whole period of our domination" (C., p. 165). It is very interesting that Thackeray excludes from his charge his own time and is convinced about the general improvement of the situation in Ireland due to the efforts of the reformed Parliament, to "justice, peace, and the peaceful genius and labours of great men" (C., p. 166). These words were written in 1846, a year after half the population of Ireland had died or migrated to America in consequence of the terrible blight on potatoes, the staple food of the Irish peasants. It is hardly possible that Thackeray, who was perfectly acquainted with the *grand misère* of Ireland from his own personal experience three years before and who followed with interest all political happenings in this country, was not informed about these events. But he was so firmly convinced that the only remedy for the troubles of the Irish people was a peaceful change by means of reforms, as he showed *inter alia* chiefly by his *Irish Sketch Book*, that he saw improvement even where there was none.

There were numerous other problems of contemporary political and social life in England that came under Thackeray's notice during the years he worked as a book reviewer for the *Morning Chronicle*. Thus in three of his reviews (of Disraeli's *Coningsby* and *Sybil*, and Smythe's *Historic Fancies*) he makes full use of the opportunity the books offer him for expressing his own opinions about the doctrine of Disraeli's "Young England"

party and the remedy it offered for the improvement of the established social order. Some of the books Thackeray reviewed for the *Morning Chronicle* enabled him to vent his views of the church and religion. His review of Stanley's *Life of Dr Arnold* bears witness to his hatred of religious cant, humbug and fanaticism in general and of the doctrines and proclamations of Newman and his disciples in particular. In his review of Steinmetz's autobiographical work *The Novitiate; or, a Year among the English Jesuits* his objection to Catholicism and asceticism is manifested even more clearly. Thackeray sharply condemns here the "miserable moral and bodily discipline" (C., p. 123) prevailing in Jesuit seminaries and his account of the degrading practices at such institutions is pervaded by bitter irony.

Among his best reviews, as also Ray points out, are those of biographical or autobiographical works dealing with the lives of some outstanding or interesting personages of the past (*The Life of George Brummell, Esq.*, by Captain Jesse, 6 May 1844, *Diary and Letters of Madame d'Arblay*, 25 September 1846, and Burton's *Life and Correspondence of David Hume*, 23 March 1846). When he reviews books of this kind, and the subject is congenial to him, his lively historical imagination awakes, historical persons long dead appear as living people before his inner eye and he makes them "walk the world again" (C., p. 31). Thus he depicts with subtle humour and affectionate irony the vanished society round the royal court of George III, as it stood out in his imagination when he was reading Madame d'Arblay's correspondence. He is even more successful in his description of the fashionable society of the late 18th century, which he presents in his review of Jesse's biography of Brummell. He brings "the disreputable ghosts" of that time, the aristocratic dandies and their imitators, "up from 'limbo'" and makes them appear as real and convincing personages before the reader. His review of Jesse's book has yet an additional interest. Brummell's course of life makes Thackeray consider the social position of this hero of fashion, who was only the grandson of a footman, but surpassed even his king, George IV, by his simplicity, elegance and impudence. Thackeray emphasizes that the life of this great discoverer of starched neckcloths was perfectly empty and useless, but that he, for this very reason, flourished "in a society of which it may be said that it was worthy of him" (C., p. 32). Thackeray's sketch of Brummell's character, as he sums it up from the book reviewed and illustrates by his own opinion, is pervaded by his profound contempt for the fashionable society of Brummell's time, which elevated this great dandy to honour, even if he was "heartless, and a swindler, a fool, a glutton, and a liar" (C., p. 36). This disgust at the social and moral codes upheld by the highest social classes of 18th century England is typically Thackerayan. It is motivated by his opposition to the social and moral standards valid among the fashionable society of his own time, an opposition which informs all his writings dealing with contemporary society and is the unifying theme of his masterpiece *Vanity Fair*.

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Thackeray's *Morning Chronicle* book reviews possess, too, great interest as criticism, and to this aspect we shall pay particular attention. They

represent, in our opinion, the most successful practical application so far of Thackeray's theoretical views of criticism and of the duties and rights of the critic and reviewer. Even if Thackeray did not work out any consistent body of critical doctrine, a fairly accurate idea of his conception of criticism may be obtained from his appreciation of individual writers and their work to be found in his earlier book reviews, and also from his casual remarks upon criticism in general, dispersed through his earlier writings. If we attempt to sum up his critical ideals we come to the following conclusions: Thackeray was a staunch admirer of the protagonists of the struggle for establishing English criticism upon new foundations (especially of Carlyle and Hazlitt) and himself contributed to this campaign, if not very significantly. Like Carlyle's, Thackeray's relation to the old canons of criticism was also one of active opposition: he refused the dictatorial rules prevailing in the periodical criticism of his time and protested both against the current "system of too much abusing" and "system of too much praising". He was conscious of the essentially wrong attitude of the critics of the old neo-classic school towards authors and proposed a new relationship, largely indebted to the critical doctrine of Carlyle: a critic has a great responsibility both towards the writer and the public, between whom he "has to arbitrate", and he should be an honest judge "sitting in judgment and delivering solemn opinions", who must "tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth" about the book criticized. His praise should be well directed, he should have an honest admiration for genius, but has no right to indulge in uncritical panegyrics if there is no ground which would justify them. As Thackeray saw it, the critic must be sometimes severe, but has no right to use the critical rule as a schoolmaster's rod and flog "every morsel of skin" off the author's back. The proper method of exposing faults is, as Thackeray half-seriously explains, the following:

"If the subject to be operated upon be a poor weak creature, switch him gently, and then take him down. If he be a pert pretender, as well as an ignoramus, cut smartly, and make him cry out; his antics will not only be amusing to the lookers on, but instructive likewise: a warning to other impostors, who will hold their vain tongues, and not be quite so ready for the future to thrust themselves in the way of the public. But, as a general rule, never flog a man, unless there are hopes of him; if he be a real malefactor, sinning not against taste merely, but truth, give him a grave trial and punishment: don't flog him, but brand him solemnly, and then cast him loose. The best cure for humbug is satire — here above typified as the rod; for crime, you must use the *hot iron*: but this, thank Heaven! is seldom needful, not more than once or twice in the seven-and-thirty years that we ourselves have sat on the bench."¹⁶

We learn who was the ideal critic for Thackeray from his panegyrics on Hazlitt in his *Morning Chronicle* review of Horne's *New Spirit of the Age* (2 April 1844). Hazlitt, in Thackeray's eyes, possessed all the necessary parts of a good critic's equipment:

"With partialities and prejudices innumerable, he had a wit so keen, a sensibility so exquisite, an appreciation of humour, or pathos, or even of the greatest art, so lively, quick, and cultivated, that it was always good to know what were the impress-

ions made by books, or men, or pictures on such a mind; and that, as there were not probably a dozen men in England with powers so varied, all the rest of the world might be rejoiced to listen to the opinions of this accomplished critic."¹⁷

It deserves mention that Thackeray warmly praises Hazlitt's "popular" habits and sympathies and prefers this independent "ragged philosopher", who obtained an irregular education and lived in poverty, to the established critical authorities of his time, who scorned him and hooted him down.

If we investigate Thackeray's *Morning Chronicle* book criticisms as a concrete embodiment of his critical ideals, we come to the conclusion that the critic stands out in them as a judge dispensing justice. He gives ungrudging tribute to anything good he finds in the books reviewed (accuracy of information, original observations, earnestness and honesty of purpose in non-fictional works; successfully delineated character or milieu, lively humour etc. in fiction) whatever reservations he might make about the work as a whole. This aspect of his critical power is most clearly manifested in his reviews of Dickens's *Cricket on the Hearth*, and Disraeli's *Coningsby* and *Sybil*, which we shall discuss below. In some of his reviews, but comparatively rarely, he appears as a dispenser of praise: he finds nothing to blame for instance in Jerrold's *Mrs. Caudle's Curtain Lectures* and in Horace Smith's poetry. Although he is a generous critic, he never indulges in excessive laudation, not even in these two reviews where he finds nothing to censure. On the other hand, if the book he criticizes deviates markedly from the standard of real excellence, he is swift to pronounce his sentence of blame and levels the sharp shafts of his irony and satire at the offender. So, too, he is irritated, whenever he meets dishonesty, insincerity, vacuity of intelligence and self-complacency on the part of the writer, insufficient knowledge of the subject, lack of reliable information or any misrepresentation of reality in his work. For egotism, which had always been odious to him, he severely castigates for instance Mohan Lal, the author of *Travels in the Punjab* (6 April 1846) and Benjamin Robert Haydon, the author of *Lectures on Painting and Design* (19 June 1846), and points out that these writers are more intensely occupied with their own persons than with the subjects of their books. Another serious offence, which is unpardonable in his eyes, is tediousness in a book, whether it is a travel-book, such as Carus's *Travels in England* (16 March 1846), or a poem, such as Bulwer-Lytton's *New Timon* (21 April 1846), or an essayistic work, as Horne's *New Spirit of the Age*. What a great master of irony Thackeray was can be most fully seen in his reviews of these tedious books, for he succeeds, as Ray also points out, in making even them amusing and interesting. His greatest achievement in this respect is his review of Carus's book, in which he treats the stupid work as if it were a work of "one of the greatest humorists that ever lived"¹⁸ who provokes laughter not by wit and ingenuity like other humorous writers, but by his dullness and imbecility. For all his unmerciful attacks upon the author, however, Thackeray cannot help being grateful to him that he provided him with much amusement. He is not so grateful to Bulwer-Lytton and points out that the general impression of his epic *New Timon* is "one of intolerable tedium" (C., p. 129) and that it lacks most of the essential characteristics of a good poem.

The above mentioned authors are not the only victims of Thackeray's irony, he levels his satirical attacks also against several others, whose works deviated in some way from the standard by which he measured and provoked him by their naïveté, shallowness or pretentiousness (Alexis Soyer's *Gastronomic Regenerator*, 4 July 1846, James Fenimore Cooper's *Ravensnest; or, the Red Skins*, 27 August 1846, E. J. Lane's *Life at the Water Cure*, 1 September 1846, and F. W. Trench's *Royal Palaces*, 5 October 1846). In none of these cases, however, does Thackeray's criticism turn into "too much abusing", malice or slander, the faults he exposes fully deserve the censure he gives them.

One of the main merits of Thackeray as the book reviewer of the *Morning Chronicle* is his ability to grasp the importance a particular book has for the contemporary reading public, for the society in which it has its roots. From his casual comments upon literature we learn that he had always been acutely conscious of the great social responsibility of the writer, especially of a popular writer of the Dickensian type, whose "words go forth to vast congregations of mankind";¹⁹ it is also well-known how deeply he felt his own responsibility to society when he attained popularity and fame. No less strongly did he feel the social responsibility inherent in his critical office, as a critic of contemporary literature. If a book he is reviewing has achieved popularity and is read and talked about by everybody, like Dickens's *Cricket on the Hearth*, he considers it to be his duty as a critic to ask, whether it is really "a good book which so excites you and all the public with emotion" (C., p. 88) and to answer the question after a thorough, objective and responsible examination of the strong and weak points of the author's creative method. If the critics' voice is loud in praise of a new book and he comes to the conclusion that their eulogy is misplaced, as in the case of Bulwer-Lytton's *New Timon*, he feels bound to guard the purity of the literary taste of the reading public and to correct the critics' unfounded enthusiasm. How successful he was in evaluating the effect and influence which a book he had in hand would have on his contemporaries is also obvious from his introduction to his review of Dickens's Christmas book, where he evokes the atmosphere of English Christmas of his own time and deals with the contemporary appeal of the story, or in his review of Jerrold's *Mrs. Caudle's Curtain Lectures*, in which he discusses at some length the impression Jerrold's characters made upon contemporary readers.

The most important aspect of his *Morning Chronicle* book reviews, which is the root of all their merits, is Thackeray's unswerving truth to "nature". The objective foundation for his evaluation of books is always reality itself, that sphere of life described and depicted in them. This is clearly manifested not only in his reviews of non-fictional works, but first and foremost in his reviews of fiction, to which we shall devote a detailed discussion in the following chapter. There are however several other positive aspects of Thackeray's criticism which we cannot treat as fully as they deserve here. His *Morning Chronicle* book reviews display the variety of his gifts as a critic and the originality, vigour and freshness of his criticism even more clearly than his earlier critical contributions. They bear witness to Thackeray's sound literary taste, his ability of discerning the grain from the chaff and his strong propensity to laugh at

dullness and pretension. His wit and irony especially are irresistible and never miss their targets. The critic convincingly reveals his ability of grasping the "moral" of the book he reviews, of penetrating to the core of its subject and presenting it to the reader in a few happily worded sentences. If the subject is congenial to him, he never misses this opportunity for throwing new light upon it by original observations of his own. The quotations chosen from the books reviewed are always apt and interesting; they may seem rather long to some present-day readers, but this was the necessary concession of the critic to the fashion of his time in reviewing practice.

In spite of all these merits, Thackeray's *Morning Chronicle* book reviews are criticism not devoid of blemishes and faults. As in his earlier criticisms of books here too Thackeray allows himself from time to time to be carried away by his personal preferences and dislikes, manifested in occasional outbursts of sentiment on his part. This peculiar impulsiveness, however, no longer tempts him to one-sided and prejudiced judgment: his praise and censure are not misplaced, and he is always able to give satisfactory reasons for his dislikes. This absence of his earlier critical errors may be partly accounted for by the fact that he did not review for the *Morning Chronicle* any works of foreign writers of fiction, to whom he had often before failed to do justice. The main reason, however, must be sought in his matured vision of life and literature, the noticeable development of his critical power and the clear-cut critical standard which he worked out and used by the time his long apprenticeship to literature was drawing to its close.

II.

The strong points of Thackeray's criticism find their most successful embodiment in his reviews of contemporary fiction, which he wrote for the magazine between 1844 and 1846. The works of fiction that came into his hands are not many, nor are they generally outstanding as far as their literary value is concerned (Disraeli's *Coningsby*, 13 May 1844 and *Sybil*, 13 May 1845, Lever's *St. Patrick's Eve*, 3 April 1845, and a series of Christmas books, Dickens's *Cricket on the Hearth*, 24 December 1845, Jerrold's *Mrs. Caudle's Curtain Lectures*, 26 December 1845 and Mrs Gore's *Snow Storm*, 31 December 1845). But his reviews of these books possess a manifold interest and value for all Thackerayan research workers, not only because they reveal Thackeray as a competent critic of fiction, but because they show, as Ray also points out, Thackeray's reading and his reflection upon it in the three important years before his masterpiece began to appear. Thus they help us to understand more fully his growth as a novelist at that crucial period of his life and the development of his views of literature in general and of fiction in particular.

It is a fact familiar from Thackeray's casual statements on literature and art, dispersed throughout his other writings, that he was deeply conscious of the ideological significance of literature and firmly convinced that literary works enable the reader to come to a better and deeper understanding of life and human society. In 1840 he wrote these significant words in his *Paris Sketch Book*:

"There is, however, a cheap and delightful way of travelling, that a man may perform in his easy chair, without expense of passports or postboys. On the wings of a novel, from the next circulating library, he sends his imagination a-gadding, and gains acquaintance with people and manners, whom he could not hope otherwise to know. Twopence a volume bears us whithersoever we will; back to *Ivanhoe* and *Coeur de Lion*, or to *Waverley* and the *Young Pretender*, along with *Walter Scott*; up to the heights of fashion with the charming enchanter of the silver-fork School; or, better still, to the snug inn parlour, or the jovial taproom, with *Mr. Pickwick* and his faithful *Sancho Weller*. I am sure that a man who, a hundred years hence, should sit down to write the history of our time, would do wrong to put that great contemporary history of *Pickwick* aside, as a frivolous work. It contains true character under false names; and, like *Roderick Random*, an inferior work, and *Tom Jones* (one that is immeasurably superior), gives us a better idea of the state and ways of the people, than one could gather from any more pompous or authentic histories."²⁰

Viewing the novels and stories he reviewed for the *Morning Chronicle* from this angle, he assesses their contribution to the reader's knowledge of the contemporary world and pays special attention to the problem of what should be the province of the novel and the business of the novelist. He does not present any consistent theory of the novelist's art, but his commentary is remarkable and deserves our full attention.

Having carefully read and examined the works of some contemporary writers of fiction (*Disraeli*, *Lever*, *Mrs. Trollope*, *Jerrold*, *Dickens*, English "religious" novelists, and *Eugène Sue* in France), *Thackeray* feels bound to sound the alarm against their treatment of the novel. He is disturbed by a conspicuous tendency to be observed among these writers, which is "prodigiously on the increase, and can tend, as we fancy, to little good" (C., p. 72). Contemporary humorists and writers of fiction, as he sees it, go too far in their endeavour to make their works informative, use them first and foremost for didactic ends and thus make out of them political, religious or economic pamphlets and manifestos. *Thackeray* is especially irritated when humorous writers like *Jerrold*, *Lever* and *Dickens* succumb to this tendency, suddenly turn into "comic moralists" and "social regenerators", adopt a didactic tone and instruct the reader by preaching to him their "comic philosophy" or "comic politics". Comic writers should occupy themselves, as he writes in his review of *A'Beckett's* Christmas book, *The Comic Blackstone*, only with their joking "and with nothing else", they should not "pretend to regenerate the world" (C., pp. 102, 101). If they try to officiate as deep philosophers, moralists and politicians, they overload their books with an obtrusive and unnecessary "moral ballast", writes *Thackeray*, and proceeds:

"If we want instruction, we prefer to take it from fact rather than from fiction. We like to hear sermons from his reverence at church; to get our notions of trade, crime, politics, and other national statistics, from the proper papers and figures; but when suddenly, out of the gilt pages of a pretty picture book, a comic moralist rushes forward, and takes occasion to tell us that society is diseased, the laws unjust, the rich ruthless, the poor martyrs, the world lop-sided, and *vice versa*, persons who wish to lead an easy life are inclined to remonstrate against this literary ambushade. You may be very right, the remonstrant would say, and I am sure are very hearty and honest, but as these questions you propound here comprehend the whole scheme

of politics and morals, with a very great deal of religion, I am, I confess, not prepared at the present moment to enter into them. Without wishing to be uncomplimentary, I have very shrewd doubts as to your competency to instruct upon all these points; at all events, I would much rather hear you on your own ground — amusing by means of amiable fiction, and instructing by kindly satire, being careful to avoid the discussion of abstract principles, beyond those of the common ethical science which forms a branch of all poets and novelists' business — but, above all, eschewing questions of politics and political economy, as too deep, I will not say for your comprehension, but for your readers'; and never, from their nature, properly to be discussed in any, the most gilded, story-book" (C., p. 71).

Elsewhere in the *Morning Chronicle* Thackeray specifies what abstract principles to be avoided by the novelist he has in mind and mentions principles of chemistry, astronomy, algebra, religion, political economy and "other abstract science". Throughout his argument there runs the conviction that the instructive character of literature is equal to that of science (elsewhere he said expressly that novels "are as instructive as the biggest quartos in the world"²¹), but simultaneously there runs, too, the distinction between these two ideological approaches and their specific ways of handling identical material and spheres of life. As Thackeray correctly showed, the scientist and the novelist have their different specific spheres and neither has a right to usurp the place of the other. He illustrates his meaning by the following comparison:

"If Professor Faraday were to produce a comic novel to his audience at the Royal Institution, or Paul de Kock publish lectures on chemistry, it is certain that the admirers of either would be disappointed, and would have a right to cry out against the imposition."²²

According to Thackeray's view, which may be summed up from his whole argument, even if it is not expressly declared to such an extent as we develop it here, it is facts, concrete data, statistics, experiments etc. that make the study of scientists, and it is human beings and their actions that make the study of novelists. The novelist's business is to paint human life, to show us pictures of people as individuals and social animals, with all the wealth of their psychology, way of life, actions and behaviour, emotions, thoughts and moral character. Human society is the novelist's broadest theme:

"Morals and manners we believe to be the novelist's best themes; and thence prefer romances which do not treat of algebra, religion, political economy, or other abstract science" (C., pp. 77-78).

As far as Thackeray mentions political economy as one of the forbidden themes of the novelist, nobody would indeed doubt the correctness of his statement. But among the problems which he most emphatically excludes from the sphere of the novelist we find also contemporary political problems and even the most topical of them, the "Condition of England question", which he expressly mentions in one of his several reflections upon this matter. At first sight this would seem a very heretical statement, if we take into account the time at which it was pronounced (1845), when the "Condition of England question", i. e. the relationship between the

exploiters and the exploited, was becoming the centre of interest not only of those whom it concerned most, the English working masses, but also of some of the more open-minded politicians, historians, philosophers, lawyers, economists, and writers of fiction. A lack of interest in this vital problem appeared as a grave deficiency in Thackeray's time and appears as such also from our historical perspective, and therefore Thackeray's argument deserves at this point a more thorough examination.

To maintain that Thackeray himself was not interested in the "Condition of England question" and other political and social problems of his time would mean to do injustice to his active and inquiring mind and to ignore his frequent allusions and reflections concerning these matters in his writings and correspondence. If he makes it a law that novelists should not treat contemporary political problems in their works, he has several grave reasons for doing so. One of them is the writers' insufficient familiarity with their subject and want of personal experience of what they intend to describe. According to his view, contemporary "political" novelists "meddle with subjects of which their small studies have given them but a faint notion" and thence "treat complicated and delicate questions with apologies instead of argument". This is, as he concludes, "not only dishonest, but it is a bore" (C., p. 101). The stress upon the necessity of the writer's perfect acquaintance with his material, his thorough and intimate knowledge of what he is going to depict, is not a novel thing with Thackeray and implies his realistic aesthetics. The emphasis he laid upon the writer's personal experience was not a mere theoretical proclamation on his part: in his own novels he never drew fanciful pictures of people or social classes with whom he was not familiar, and his creative writing was for him "that inevitable repertory of all one's thoughts and experiences".²³

Another objection Thackeray lodges against contemporary writers of "political" fiction is their inconsistent and infirm political creed: they change their political views either several times during their literary career (like Disraeli) or even within one work (like Mrs. Trollope in her *Jessie Phillips: A Tale of the New Poor Law*). Having no firm political persuasion, they lose their way, as Thackeray points out, in "the crabbed labyrinths of political controversy" (C., p. 72) and make themselves ridiculous. Thackeray's most serious complaint, however, is directed against the utter inadequacy of the novelists who have chosen the "Condition of England question" as their theme, to present in their works any real and realizable solution of the great social struggle they describe, to offer any effective remedy for the social evils they depict. In his review of Lever's *St. Patrick's Eve* Thackeray presents a burlesque plot of a novel depicting the class struggle in the English countryside, ridicules the schematic treatment of the theme which was the fashion in novels of this kind and condemns the compromise happy ends such novels offer instead of a solution:

"Has any sentimental writer organised any feasible scheme for bettering the poor? Has any one of them, after weeping over poor Jack, and turning my lord to ridicule, devised anything for the substantial benefit of the former? At the conclusion of these tales, when the poor hero or heroine has been bullied enough — when poor Jack has been put off the murder he was meditating, or poor Polly has been rescued

from the town on which she was about to go — there somehow arrives a misty reconciliation between the poor and the rich; a prophecy is uttered of better times for the one, and better manners in the other; presages are made of happy life, happy marriage and children, happy beef and pudding for all time to come; and the characters make their bow, grinning, in a group, as they do at the end of a drama when the curtain falls, and the blue fire blazes behind the scenes" (C., pp. 73-74).

The upshot of his argument is that

"This is not the way in which men seriously engaged and interested in the awful question between rich and poor meet and grapple with it. When Cobden thunders against the landlords, he flings figures and facts into their faces, as missiles with which he assails them; he offers, as he believes, a better law than their's as a substitute for that which they uphold. When Sir Robert Peel resists or denies or takes up the standard which he has planted, and runs away, it is because he has cogent prudential reasons for his conduct of the day. But on one side and the other it is a serious contest which is taking place in the press and Parliament over the "Condition of England question". The novelist as it appears to us, ought to be a non-combatant. But if he persists in taking a side, don't let him go into the contest unarmed; let him do something more effectual than call the enemy names. The cause of either party in this great quarrel requires a stronger championship than this, and merits a more earnest warfare."

It is obvious, then, that Thackeray protests not so much against the choice of such a theme itself, but against the authors' incapable way of handling it. If he is convinced that fiction is not the place for useless and incompetent discussions of the "Condition of England question", he is at the same time perfectly aware that the condition and life of the people, especially of the most oppressed section of it, the working class, should find its reflection in literature as the inseparable part of contemporary reality. He appreciated, as we can learn from his other writings, those novelists and poets who were the first to venture into the "awful, awful poor man country", of which the English ruling classes (himself included) have been quite ignorant and uninformed, "until some poet like Hood wakes and sings that dreadful "Song of the Shirt"; some prophet like Carlyle rises up and denounces woe; some clear-sighted, energetic man like the writer of the *Chronicle* (i. e. the *Morning Chronicle* — L. P.) travels into the poor man's country for us, and comes back with his tale of terror and wonder".²⁴ He gave unstinted praise to Dickens, as the only modern novelist who truthfully depicts the life of the London poor, that "tremendous society moving around us, and unknown to us",²⁵ and even if he preserved some doubts about certain aspects of his creative method, he highly valued Dickens's depiction as a tender hand given to the poor and a kind word uttered to the unhappy. Also in his *Morning Chronicle* reviews of fiction he pays attention to this sphere of life hitherto almost entirely neglected by the English literature of his day and suggests what should be the equipment of the writer who would venture upon this untrodden path. The most important part of his equipment is again intimate knowledge of the subject:

"A man who was really familiar with the mill and the mine might now, we should think, awaken great public attention as a novelist. It is a magnificent and

untrodden field (for Mrs. Trollope's Factory story was wretched caricaturing, and Mr. Disraeli appears on the ground rather as an amateur): to describe it well, a man should be born to it. We want a Boz from among the miners or the manufactories to detail their ways of work and pleasure — to describe their feelings, interests, and lives, public and private" (C., p. 80).

* * *

The above theoretical reflections of Thackeray upon the tasks, aims and methods of fiction are more clearly displayed when applied to the concrete appreciation of individual authors and their works. The best opportunity for venting his own opinions about the place of political problems in fiction was offered by Disraeli's novels *Coningsby* and *Sybil* and Lever's *St. Patrick's Eve*, from the reviews of which most of the above quotations are chosen. The subject which these works of fiction aimed to illustrate was the condition of the people, their purpose was to open people's eyes to certain social evils of the time. It is not surprising, then, that in reviewing these books Thackeray is above all else interested in their subject-matter and purpose, to the evaluation of which he devotes more space than to other aspects of their authors' creative method.

In his reviews of Disraeli's novels, the acknowledged literary manifestos of the "Young England" party, Thackeray pays great attention to the political programme propagated by the author. He appreciates the positive aspects of Disraeli's doctrine embodied in his novels: his truthful exposure of the dirty political game of the Whigs and Tories, and his severe hits at both parties. It is good, Thackeray is convinced, "to find gentlemen sitting with the present government acknowledging the cant of its professions, the entire uncertainty of its aims, the hollowness of its views, and for the imminent convulsions of the country its utter inadequacy to provide". Thackeray then proceeds to point out that even if Disraeli shows the evils of political and social life in England well enough, when he "comes to legislate for them . . . his reasoning becomes altogether unsatisfactory" (C., p. 42). The reviewer professes himself unable to decipher Disraeli's parable of "Young England" and to understand what are the aims of this new political programme. In spite of this, however, in his summary of the doctrine, which he presents in his review of Smythe's *Historic Fancies*, he succeeds in grasping its main drawbacks and explaining the progress it has made since its first appearance:

"The Tractarians led the way to give a religious sanctity to the enterprise; and in order at once to engage the sympathies of the masses . . ., the spirit of Christian charity was made to go rather ostentatiously hand in hand with Christian doctrine for the sufferings of the poor, who always have suffered since the world began, were now bewailed as they never had been, by the rich and lordly — the selfish vices of the wealthy confessed and rebuked by men from amongst its own very ranks. Above all, a vague alarm for the consequences of these things was sedulously expressed; gloomy prospects painted of the future; whilst, by way of contrast, bright and tantalizing visions were conjured up of the state of society in some indefinitely "by-gone days", when the rich cared for the poor, and fed them with all good things of this earth, the poor doing light and cheerful service in return, and all men lived in the fear of God, and in charity and love with one another. To heighten the effect

of this comfortable picture, something yet was added by the skilful hand of this moral magician — the sports and pastimes of the good ancient days were invoked upon the tapis after the roast beef and ale of Old England had been disposed of, and so the best wish that could be offered to man was in imagination realized — plenty waited on appetite, health and contentment on both!" (C., p. 56).

Thackeray then proceeds to demonstrate that such a political programme is very unsatisfactory, for it is in its substance vague prophecy and dangerous demagoguery, which disturbs men's minds by offering them "something as yet undefined" as a remedy for their present troubles. From Thackeray's whole argument it is obvious that he particularly resented the fundamental principle of the Young Englanders' doctrine — the proposal for the revival of some undefined "good old times", in fact feudalism and the feudal mode of exploitation. His attitude to the Middle Ages had always been very critical, and is most strikingly revealed in his truthful depiction of feudal barbarity in *Miss Tickletoby's Lectures on the English History and Rebecca and Rowena*. In one of his *Morning Chronicle* contributions, his review of Moore's history of Ireland, he expresses his opinion about the real character of these "good old times" most clearly, even if he takes notice only of some of its aspects:

"Persecution was a condition of faith in the past period, axe and fire the weapons of argument all the world over, in those wicked middle ages of which romancers like to make chivalrous pageants, and we madmen in Young England and Young Ireland prate about" (C., p. 165).

The clear-sightedness of Thackeray's evaluation of Disraeli's Young England doctrine will be more apparent if we confront his judgments with those pronounced by Marx and Engels. In their *Manifesto of the Communist Party* the classic writers of Marxism call Disraeli's doctrine by the apt name "feudal socialism", explain its origin (more satisfactorily than Thackeray, for they reveal the very social roots of the doctrine) and characterize it as "half lamentation, half lampoon; half echo of the past, half menace of the future; at times, by its bitter, witty and incisive criticism, striking the bourgeoisie to the very heart's core; but always ludicrous in its effect, through total incapacity to comprehend the march of modern history".²⁶

Thackeray is not only dissatisfied with Disraeli's political programme itself, he is also extremely irritated by the way in which the author works it out in characters, plot and authorial commentary. As he saw it, one of the grave demerits of Disraeli's novels is the great quantity of digressions, disquisitions and commentaries, by means of which the author inflicts upon his readers his own political doctrine, various political fallacies and also his "Caucasian theory", i. e. his views of the position and future of the Jewish race. *Sybil* is, as Thackeray points out, even more overloaded with such discussions of pretentious subjects and abstract principles than is *Coningsby*, "there is more Venetian theory, more high flown Young England mystery, much apologizing for the exiled Stuart family; much satire against the "great English families of the Reformation", and some cruel hitting at the "Stadhouder of Holland" and the Dutch system of finance" (C., p. 79). Thackeray ironically suggests a list of reference books,

which should be sent by book-sellers to their country correspondents "as a key to 'Sibyl'" and mentions books on history, economy, agriculture, manufacture, banking, and credit, for all these problems, as he emphasizes, are discussed in the novel. After the reading of this necessary literature, "the reader would be competent to judge this wonderful author; and . . . to form theories for himself, after masfering such a political encyclopaedia" (C., p. 79).

As far as *Coningsby* is concerned, besides criticizing the author's use of commentary and dialogue, Thackeray pronounces his utter dissatisfaction with the one-sided picture of contemporary society presented in the novel. Disraeli's endeavour to introduce the reader "to none but the very best company" (C., p. 40), English fashionable aristocratic society, makes Thackeray classify the novel among the productions of the Silver-fork school of fiction, so often and so sharply criticized and parodied by him before. As Thackeray sees it, *Coningsby* is a fashionable novel pushed to extremest verge of this kind of literature, the very glorification of dandyism, and Disraeli stands out in this work as the leading preacher and teacher of dandies. The reviewer makes use of this opportunity to address a few ironic remarks to the whole school of contemporary fashionable novelists:

"Not an unremarkable characteristic of our society-novelists is that ardour of imagination which sets them so often to work in describing grand company for us. They like to disport themselves in inventing fine people, as we to sit in this imaginary society. There is something *naïf* in this credulity on both sides: in these cheap Barmecide entertainments, to which author and reader are content to sit down. Mr. Disraeli is the most splendid of all feast-givers in this way — there is no end to the sumptuous hospitality of his imagination."²⁷

From Thackeray's whole argument and the confrontation of his criticism of *Coningsby* with that of another work produced by the Silver-fork school of novelists, Mrs Gore's *Sketches of English Character*, it follows that Disraeli is in his eyes a graver culprit in this respect than such writers as Mrs Gore, who present in their works a simple, naïve description of fashionable society without any pretensions or edifying purposes. Disraeli, however, endeavours to represent in his dandies regenerators of the diseased bourgeois society, and this is in Thackeray's eyes absurd and unpardonable:

"Dandies are here made to regenerate the world — to heal the wounds of the wretched body politic — to infuse new blood into torpid old institutions — to reconcile the ancient world to the modern — to solve the doubts and perplexities which at present confound us — and to introduce the supreme truth to the people, as theatre managers do the sovereign to the play, smiling, and in silk stockings, and with a pair of wax candles" (C., p. 39).

Besides rejecting the ridiculous notion that indolent and socially useless dandies could be the saviours of the English people, Thackeray also points out that these protagonists of Disraeli's political programme are not represented in his novel truthfully, do not appear before the reader as convincing and life-like personages:

"The dandyism, moreover, is intense, but not real; not English, that is. It is vastly too ornamental, energetic, and tawdry for our quiet habits. The author's coxcombry is splendid, gold-land, refulgent, like that of Murat rather than that of Brummell" (C., pp. 40-41).

We know that these foibles of Disraeli's creative method, his pretentiousness, his delight in false Oriental splendour and fashionable themes and characters, and his ornamental and bombastic style, had always repelled and irritated Thackeray: he criticized them *inter alia* also in his later review of the novel in *Pictorial Times* and ridiculed them most successfully in his masterly parody of Disraeli's style, in *Novels by Eminent Hands*.

Even if Thackeray makes so many and so grave reservations about Disraeli's creative approach to reality, he is able to appreciate its positive aspects. He gives unstinted praise to Disraeli's faithful depiction of the political tricks and practices of the English ruling political parties and lays stress upon the author's gift of humour and satire, which is often directed against things, persons, and practices deserving to be ridiculed. As Disraeli's best achievement in *Coningsby* Thackeray regards his satirical portraits of contemporary politicians, his "amusing bitter sketches of Tadpole, Rigby, Monmouth, and the rest, of which the likenesses were irresistible, and the malice tickled everybody. There is no master in this style of delineation, since Swift's day, more dexterous and faithful than Mr. Disraeli".²⁸ *Sybil*, on the other hand, as Thackeray points out, lacks the evidence of Disraeli's gift of satirical portraiture and malicious caricature, which was the strong point of *Coningsby*, even if the rogueries of the "cabals of parliamentary parties" are satirized in it successfully. To the reviewer's regret, however, even the best pages of Disraeli's novels are not without blemishes, for in his satire too his supreme coxcombry intervenes, and the reader is inevitably led to laugh not only at the characters whom the author holds up to ridicule, but at the author himself.

Whereas Disraeli's depiction of English contemporary society in *Coningsby* contains only some grains of truth and is upon the whole rather false than faithful, the picture presented by him in *Sybil* is, as Thackeray correctly emphasizes, much more successful. The reviewer praises Disraeli's aim of including in the framework of his picture not only the life of the highest social classes in England, but "the whole cycle of labour", the working class both in the country and the town, and gives ungrudging tribute to his depiction of the horrible colony of agricultural labourers, in which he sees the best part of the novel. Particularly praiseworthy in his eyes is the novelist's endeavour to introduce the reader into the mysterious world of factory workers and miners. But in this case, as Thackeray clearly understands, Disraeli's descriptions are not satisfactory, not because he has no sympathy with his subject, but because he lacks the necessary experience and familiarity with it. Thackeray shows that the author's insufficient knowledge of the English working class is most strikingly revealed in his delineation of the characters of factory workers and miners, "with whose features the writer is not sufficiently familiar to be able to sketch them off with the ease that is requisite in the novelist" (C., pp. 82-83).

For all his critical words directed against Disraeli's depiction of the English working class in *Sybil*, the reviewer is able to grasp its social significance: he is convinced that it "can do good" by turning the readers' attention to this novel subject and by sending travellers from among the English ruling classes to manufacturing and mining districts. He highly appreciates (and quotes) Disraeli's well-known revelation about the "two nations" existing side by side within English society and praises his attempt to rend asunder the veil parting them:

"If this book can have made any members of the one nation think of the other, it is something to have done; to our idea Mr. Disraeli never said truer words than that the one nation does not know what the other does, and that it is time they should be acquainted" (C., p. 81).

We may see, then, that even if Thackeray was convinced that a novelist ought to be a non-combatant occupying "a happy neutral ground, apart from the quarrels and hatred of the world",²⁹ he is able to appreciate the help a writer of fiction can give to the cause of the oppressed by truthfully depicting their miserable condition and thus pointing it out to the public, even if he cannot offer any effectual remedy for its improvement. Neither Disraeli, nor his reviewer were able to see, however, what Engels grasped in his conception of the two nations, at which he arrived at about the same time as Disraeli, namely that the other nation, the poor, "are for the future of England much more important"³⁰ than the classes ruling it. For all their clear-sightedness in some respects both Disraeli and Thackeray, owing to their origin, education and social position, were too closely bound up with the higher social classes in England, to be able to see in the downtrodden masses of the working people the rightful heirs of the future of the country.

From Thackeray's evaluation of Disraeli's novels, as well as from his other reviews dealing with contemporary "political" fiction (his review of Lever's *St. Patrick's Eve* and Cooper's *Ravensnest*) his own position is more obvious than it is from the theoretical argument of his with which we opened this chapter. There can be no doubt that he acutely felt the necessity that contemporary social and political life should be reflected in literature: at that time he was attaining the heights of the novelist's art himself and in his *Vanity Fair* presented a remarkable embodiment of his own outlook upon the place of political and social morals in fiction. He could not help protesting, however, whenever he met this broad theme handled in the way that Disraeli and Lever handled it, he could not help rebelling whenever he saw the novel as a literary genre maltreated at the hands of some contemporary writers. He sometimes errs, especially in his theoretical argument; he is unjust to Dickens for example, when he puts him artistically on the same level as Disraeli, Lever and Jerrold, when he calls his heart-felt sympathy with the oppressed "comic politics", and when he protests against Dickens's attacks upon "fundholders and manufacturers". A fundamental mistake is his assertion that the novelist should be a non-combatant, an uncommitted and neutral observer of social struggles. In this respect he commits an injustice towards his own works in which, especially in the most artistically successful, he does very clearly express through the medium of his pictures his own very definite moral and even political standpoint. His argument as a whole, however, and

especially his concrete appreciation of "political" novelists, contain much truth which remains valid up to the present day. Their main merit is that they so remarkably display Thackeray's firm and unchanging insistence upon realism in literature, which in this case penetrates far more deeply below the superficial aspects of the novelist's art than it ever did before.

* * *

In the remaining reviews of fiction written for the *Morning Chronicle* Thackeray once more unflinchingly follows the principles of realistic aesthetics, while paying greater attention to what we could perhaps call legitimate novel-interest, i. e. characters, plot and situations, than in his appreciation of "political" fiction. Especially worthy of notice are his reviews of two Christmas books, Dickens's *Cricket on the Hearth*³¹ and Jerrold's *Mrs. Caudle's Curtain Lectures*, in which he most strikingly reveals his own conception of the formation of literary characters. Thackeray had always most highly appreciated all those novelists (and in his earlier years especially Henry Fielding) who created in their novels life-like characters whom the reader is disposed to accept as actual people, whom he can "live into". In his opinion Douglas Jerrold possesses the power of bestowing upon his characters this sort of actuality and therefore his book has a great advantage over Dickens's in respect of truth and reality. The great charm of Jerrold's *Mrs. Caudle's Curtain Lectures* is the "credibility of Mr. and Mrs. Caudle", writes Thackeray, and proceeds:

"The couple have become real living personages in history, like Queen Elizabeth, or Sancho Panza, or Parson Adams, or any other past character, who, false or real once, is only imaginary now, and for whose existence we have only the word of a book. And surely to create these realities is the greatest triumph of a fictitious writer — a serious or humorous poet" (C., p. 95).

As Thackeray emphasizes, the consequence of this vitality of Jerrold's characters was that they became objects of incessant sympathy on the part of the contemporary reading public and that Mrs. Caudle's death was universally lamented. According to Thackeray the social significance of the book is even wider than its contemporary appeal, for Jerrold depicted the life of an English bourgeois family so truthfully that future generations may get out of it "as accurate pictures of London life as we can out of the pictures of Hogarth" (C., pp. 93—94).

Thackeray then confronts Jerrold's characters with those of Dickens and points out that the latter has created a whole gallery of such life-like personages: one of them is Mrs. Nickleby, who is, like Mrs. Caudle, an excellently drawn type of an English matron, so that "it is hard to say which of the two should have the *pas*" (C., p. 94). To the reviewer's regret, however, the characters Dickens created in his Christmas book cannot be classed among his best creations — they do not seem actual persons, "we don't believe in them" (C., p. 95). Thackeray sums up the reservations he makes about them in these remarkable words:

"To our fancy, the dialogue and characters of the "Cricket on the Hearth" are no more like nature than the talk of Tityrus and Meliboeus is like the real talk of

Bumpkin and Hodge over a stile, or than Florian's pastoral *petits maitres*, in red heels and powder, are like French peasants, with wooden shoes and a pitchfork, or than Pierrot and Carlotta in a ballet, smiling charmingly, jumping and dancing astonishingly, amidst wreaths of calico roses and fragrant pasteboard bouquets, are like a real spotless nymph, fresh from Ida, and a young demigod lately descended from Olympus. This story is no more a real story than Peerybingle is a real name. It is like one — made, as the calico-roses before-mentioned, much redder and bigger than the common plant" (C., p. 88).

Even if Thackeray is not inclined to retreat from the principles of realistic aesthetics in matters of essential artistic importance, he is ready to make some concessions in this particular case. He calls Dickens the "chief literary master of the ceremonies for Christmas" who best understands the spirit of the season and who wrote his *Cricket on the Hearth* with the sole aim in mind of cheering and amusing his readers. Thus he created a work with a special purpose, pervaded by the festive and hilarious atmosphere of the season, and the critic reconciles himself to looking at it from this Christmas point of view, as at a "good Christmas book, illuminated with extra gas, crammed with extra bonbons, French plums and sweetnesses". If the book is viewed from this angle, writes Thackeray, we may then accept, as we do in fairy tales and Christmas pantomimes, all the impossibilities and surprise effects of the plot, and may regard the pretty and pleasant, but unnatural characters as "a sort of half-recognized realities" (C., pp. 78, 88, 91), closely akin to the charming inhabitants of fairy land. In spite of this concession Thackeray cannot help regretting that such a delicate painter of "nature" as Dickens, who on occasions not so festive as Christmas depicts reality with such an acute perception, paints, in his *Cricket on the Hearth*, with such a coarse brush. As Thackeray saw it, Dickens's improbable, fantastic creations turn literature away from its true role of faithfully reflecting and depicting reality:

"If we think that nature and quiet are still better, it is because Mr. Dickens, with other great English humorists have used us to them, O, for the artist's early and simple manner!" (C., p. 91).

On the other hand Thackeray gladly gives ungrudging tribute to such instances of Dickens's genius as the story contains, to "those touches of nature for which Mr. Dickens's hand is unrivalled". These he finds especially in the characters of Mrs Fielding and Miss Slowboy, "who having been once introduced to the reader can never be forgotten by him, and remain to be admired and laughed at for ever" (C., pp. 91-92).

From the above it follows then, that Thackeray's review of Dickens's *Cricket on the Hearth* is another example of his dual attitude, both critical and admiring, to his great brother novelist. We could quote here many other examples of this kind, in most of which — contrary to his criticism of *The Cricket on the Hearth* — his admiration definitely preponderates over his criticism. Perhaps the completest expression of his outlook upon Dickens's art may be found in his letter to David Masson, written in 1851:

"I quarrel with his Art in many respects; which I don't think represents Nature duly; for instance Micawber appears to me an exaggeration of a man, as his name

is of a name. It is delightful and makes me laugh: but it is no more a real man than my friend Punch is: and in so far I protest against him — — holding that the Art of Novels is to represent Nature; to convey as strongly as possible the sentiment of reality — in a tragedy or a poem or a lofty drama you aim at producing different emotions; the figures moving, and their words sounding, heroically: but in a drawing-room drama a coat is a coat and a poker a poker; and must be nothing else according to my ethics, not an embroidered tunic, nor a great red-hot instrument like the Pantomime weapon. But let what defects you (or rather I), will, be in Dickens's theory — there is no doubt according to my notion that his writing has one admirable quality — it is charming — that answers everything. Another may write the most perfect English have the greatest fund of wit learning & so forth — but I doubt if any novel-writer has that quality, that wonderful sweetness & freshness which belongs to Dickens."³²

The general truth of Thackeray's evaluation of Dickens's and Jerrold's Christmas books may pass unchallenged, though in some points it has been corrected by posterity. In auguring for Jerrold's *Mrs. Caudle's Curtain Lectures* an everlasting popularity Thackeray was not a reliable prophet, for the book, once so widely popular, is scarcely read nowadays, especially outside England, where it is practically unknown. As far as Dickens's *Cricket on the Hearth* is concerned, Thackeray grasped remarkably well the main weaknesses of the story, but was not able to understand the roots from which they sprung. As I. M. Katarsky points out, *The Cricket on the Hearth*, *The Battle of Life* and *The Haunted Man* are artistically considerably weaker than *Christmas Carol* and especially *The Chimes* (which he regards as one of the best of Dickens's works), owing to their noticeable retreat from social problematics. He also quotes the evaluation of *The Cricket on the Hearth* in the Chartist paper *The Northern Star*, where it is described as a story wholly devoted to the depiction of hearth and home, the narrowed theme of which places it below the level of Dickens's first two Christmas books, although it also contains valuable passages and pages depicting faithfully and acutely the world of common people. After quoting N. A. Nekrasov's reservations about the story, Katarsky concludes his evaluation of Dickens's Christmas books by mentioning the familiar fact that the bourgeois sentimentality of *The Cricket on the Hearth* irritated Lenin so much that he had to leave the dramatic version of the story in the midst of the act.³³ To blame Thackeray for the fact that he was not so clear-sighted in his criticism as were the Chartist reviewers, his contemporaries, would be quite uncritical and would mean to demand something from him which he, limited by his essentially bourgeois outlook upon the world, could not provide. But he achieved a piece of sound critical work when he displayed so convincingly the weak points of Dickens's creative method and, for this reason, his analysis of the story retains its value up to the present day.

* * *

Among Thackeray's *Morning Chronicle* book criticisms which deserve to be noticed here we find finally two reviews of Mrs Gore's works, *Sketches of English Character* and the Christmas story *The Snow Storm*, which also remarkably illustrate Thackeray's developing conception of

literature in the years preceding the publication of *Vanity Fair*. As the *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer of Ray's edition points out, "so far as Thackeray's own emerging as a master novelist was concerned, the most important of his review copies was Mrs Gore's *Sketches of English Character*, 1846". This is not surprising, since the particular social area from which this indefatigable fashionable authoress drew her materials, the life of the highest social classes, had also been Thackeray's source of inspiration ever since the beginning of his literary career and was so especially in 1846, when *Vanity Fair* was assuming a definite shape in his imagination and its first chapters were written down. Thackeray's interest in this narrow social sphere was obviously much strengthened by the reading of Mrs Gore's book, for the authoress's way of handling her materials happened to underline those characteristics of the inhabitants of her microcosm, which fascinated and attracted him most of all. Her coarse, naive and worldly descriptions written without any higher purpose, aim or moral, confirmed Thackeray's own conclusions about the social and moral codes valid in the great fair of vanities, troubled him more than he had anticipated, while they offered him a new opportunity of venting his profound disgust:

"And so, through the two volumes, she dashes and rattles on, careless, out-speaking, coarse, sarcastic, with thought the least elevating, and views quite curiously narrow. Supposing that Pall-mall were the world, and human life finished with the season, and Heaven were truffled turkies and the Opera, and duty and ambition were bounded in dressing well and getting tickets to Lady Londonderry's dancing teas, Mrs. Gore's "Sketches of Character" might be a good guide book. And we are wrong in saying it has no moral: the moral is that which very likely the author intended — that entire weariness, contempt, and dislike which the reader must undergo after this introduction to what is called the world. If it be as here represented, the world is the most hollow, heartless, vulgar, brazen world, and those are luckiest who are out of it" (C., p. 142).

Whereas in reviewing Mrs Gore's *Sketches of English Character* Thackeray admits that the authoress at least possesses intimate knowledge of her sphere and that her resulting picture of the world of fashion is "tolerably faithful" (C., p. 141), he is not so generous to her Christmas story *The Snow Storm*. He criticizes the narrowness of the social sphere depicted by the authoress, the gravity and naive respect with which she regards and presents her characters chosen from among the people of high fashion and he makes, too, grave reservations about the plot of the story. Thackeray, who disdained "the tricks and surprises of the novelists' art",³⁴ had always raised objections against the plots built upon the conventional pattern of fashionable romances, made to hang upon the usual devices — surprise effects, operations of chance, luck and fate etc. As Geoffrey Tillotson points out, in Thackeray's opinion the prime requisite for a novel are characters seemingly actual, and if they possess the air of veracity, "a little 'push' here and there by the narrator and the story is made".³⁵ For giving their characters too obvious "pushes", discordant with real happenings and actions in actual life, Thackeray criticizes in his *Morning Chronicle* book reviews Disraeli, Dickens and Bulwer-Lytton — but his gravest objections in this matter are raised against Mrs Gore.³⁶ He

denounces, too, the essential untruthfulness of her delineation of the English country people who are, as she presents them, fondly attached to their aristocratic masters and live very happily:

"They are happy on the stage, where they grin in *tableaux* before the footlights, and scatter calico garlands before their lord, who pledges them in a bumper of sparkling pasteboard, and, happy in the Christmas-books that are constructed upon the theatrical model: let this pass as one of the jokes of Christmas — to live at the very least until Twelfth-day" (C., p. 106).

* * *

The above outline of the main merits and demerits of Thackeray's *Morning Chronicle* reviews of fiction cannot exhaust all their interest. Besides the great number of various problems discussed above they contain many others no less worthy of our notice. One of these is for example the jealous regard which Thackeray the critic has for the purity of the literary language of the authors reviewed, the instances of which may be found in his review of Lever's *St. Patrick's Eve*, in which he protests against the author's careless treatment of English grammar, in his evaluation of Bulwer-Lytton's *New Timon* where he severely criticizes the author's stilted and unnatural writing, and elsewhere.

If we attempt to present a general evaluation of Thackeray's reviews of contemporary fiction in the *Morning Chronicle*, we come to the conclusion that his achievement in this field, which is always a touchstone of the real talents of a literary critic, is remarkable and worth studying. The analysis presented in this chapter enables us, too, to try to correct some statements pronounced upon Thackeray the critic by some Thackerayan scholars whose work was finished before they had the opportunity to become acquainted with his newly discovered reviews. George Saintsbury, for instance, a classic authority on Thackeray, was led by the essential impulsiveness and incalculability of Thackeray's hitherto known criticism to the conclusion that he did not follow any "fixed codes and creeds"³⁷ in criticizing literature. It is true that Thackeray's *Morning Chronicle* critical papers bear the stamp of his impulsiveness and his conception of criticism can hardly be called a fixed code or creed, but we must never lose sight of the undeniable fact that they were founded upon solid, firm and in their essence unchanging principles (at least during the period we are dealing with, up to 1848), which were Thackeray's faithful guides. The basic critical standard which Thackeray consistently upheld is his insistence upon realism in art and literature: how far a book or a picture faithfully mirrors or imitates nature — that is the standard of judgment which he invariably applied to the interpretation of individual writers or painters and their work. His *Morning Chronicle* reviews of fiction and art criticisms are a new and remarkable document as an instance of this basic tendency of his criticism. His book reviews have a further value to the student of Thackeray the critic and of his life and work, for nowhere else has he previously thrown out more or better suggestions as to the craft of fiction, the equipment a good novelist should possess to achieve a standard of real excellence.

Even if Thackeray's *Morning Chronicle* papers demonstrate his weaknesses as a critic, they also clearly reveal his critical power and fully deserve the praise awarded them by Gordon N. Ray as "critical journalism of a high order, which has substantial permanent value". Together with Thackeray's newly discovered political reports, which challenge us to a deeper study of his frame of mind in 1848, and his art criticisms, which add to our knowledge of his conception of the fine arts, Thackeray's book reviews, especially the reviews of contemporary fiction, are undoubtedly of considerable value to any Thackerayan critic and a welcome addition to all lovers of Thackeray's art.

NOTES

- ¹ *The Letters and Private Papers of William Makepeace Thackeray*, four volumes, London, Oxford University Press, 1945. Cited hereafter as *Letters*. The result of Gordon N. Ray's work at the correspondence is also his authoritative biography of W. M. Thackeray in two volumes: *Thackeray. The Uses of Adversity, 1811-1846*, London, Oxford University Press, 1955 and *Thackeray, The Age of Wisdom, 1847-1863*, London, Oxford University Press, 1958.
- ² University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1955. Further to be denoted as *Contributions*.
- ³ Lewis Benjamin, under the pen-name "Lewis Melville" reprinted Thackeray's review of Horne's *New Spirit of the Age* in his edition of Thackeray's *Critical Papers in Literature*, London, 1904, and the review was then reprinted by Saintsbury in *The Oxford Thackeray* edition. Harold Strong Gulliver reprinted the review of Horace Smith's *Poetical Works* and excerpts from the reviews of Jesse's *Life of George Brummell, Esq.* and Disraeli's *Coningsby*. See also *Contributions*, Preface, p. v. and note 1 and 2.
- ⁴ See *Letters*, II., pp. 364-365.
- ⁵ *Thackeray, The Uses of Adversity*, see p. 199.
- ⁶ *Novels of the Eighteen-Forties*, Oxford, At the Clarendon Press, 1954, p. 81.
- ⁷ *The Oxford Thackeray*, ed. George Saintsbury, 17 volumes, Oxford, 1908, VIII., p. 256. Cited hereafter as *Works*.
- ⁸ See *Letters*, II., pp. 355-357, 761-762 etc.
- ⁹ *Letters*, II., pp. 364-365.
- ¹⁰ *Istoriya angliyskoy literatury*, vol. II., part 2., Izdatelstvo Akademii nauk SSSR, Moskva, 1955, p. 299.
- ¹¹ See *Letters*, II., pp. 171, 172, 216, 225.
- ¹² "The Exhibition of the Society of Painters in Water Colours", 29 April 1844, "The Exhibitions of the Societies of Water Colours Painters", 27 April 1846, "The Exhibition of the Royal Academy", 5 May 1846, Second Notice, 7 May 1846, Third Notice, 11 May 1846.
- ¹³ See *Contributions*, pp. 135, 137 etc.
- ¹⁴ *The Times Literary Supplement*, 17 February 1956.
- ¹⁵ See *Works*, II., Introduction, p. XXII.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 360. For the above quotations see pp. 362, 361, 359.
- ¹⁷ *Contributions*, p. 14; *Works*, VI., pp. 417-418.
- ¹⁸ *Contributions*, p. 107; for his criticism of Carus's book see also *Works*, VI., pp. 549-550.
- ¹⁹ *Works*, VIII., p. 290.
- ²⁰ *Works*, II., p. 98; see also pp. 92, 93, 182.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 92.
- ²² *Contributions*, p. 101; see also p. 78.
- ²³ *Letters*, II., p. 682.
- ²⁴ *Works*, VIII., p. 257.
- ²⁵ *Works*, I., p. 132.
- ²⁶ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow 1949 (a reproduction of the translation made by Samuel Moore in 1888), p. 80.

- ²⁷ *Contributions*, p. 40. A similar remark is addressed by Thackeray to Mrs. Gore in his review of her story "The Snow Storm", see p. 104.
- ²⁸ *Contributions*, p. 78. In his review of *Coningsby*, published in *Pictorial Times* about a fortnight later than his *Morning Chronicle* review of this novel, Thackeray writes about the character of Rigby that "a better portrait of a parasite has never been written since Juvenal's days" (*Works*, VI., p. 508).
- ²⁹ *Works*, VI., p. 409.
- ³⁰ Bedřich Engels, *Postavení dělnické třídy v Anglii* (= *The Condition of the Working Class in England*), Svoboda, Praha, 1950, p. 126.
- ³¹ This is the second of his three hitherto identified reviews of Dickens's Christmas books; his review of *A Christmas Carol in Prose* appeared in *Fraser's Magazine* in February 1844, his *Morning Chronicle* review of *The Cricket on the Hearth* was published in December 1845 and the third review, that of *The Battle of Life*, appeared in *Fraser's Magazine* in January 1847. The first of these reviews contains nothing but praise: *Christmas Carol* seemed to Thackeray "a national benefit, and to every man or woman who reads it a personal kindness" (*Works*, VI., p. 415). In his review of *The Battle of Life* he makes reservations as to the life-likeness of Dickens's characters, returns to some of his critical attacks upon *The Cricket on the Hearth*, published in the *Morning Chronicle* a year before, and explains what he then had in mind. An interesting analysis of the character of Gruff-and-Tackleton may be found in his review "On Some Illustrated Children's Books", published in *Fraser's Magazine* in April 1846.
- ³² *Letters*, II., pp. 772-773.
- ³³ See *Istoriya angliyskoy literatury*, vol. II., part 2., pp. 217-218.
- ³⁴ *The Newcomes*, chapter LXX.
- ³⁵ Geoffrey Tillotson, *Thackeray the Novelist*, Cambridge University Press, 1954, p. 118. See also p. 164.
- ³⁶ See *Contributions*, p. 105.
- ³⁷ *Works*, II., Introduction, p. XVII.

LITERÁRNĚ KRITICKÁ ČINNOST

W. M. THACKERAYHO

V ČASOPISE „MORNING CHRONICLE“ (1844—1848)

V úvodu článku autorka kladně hodnotí záslušnou vydavatelskou práci amerického badatele Gordona N. Raye, jejímž posledním výsledkem je první souhrnné vydání všech doposud identifikovaných příspěvků W. M. Thackerayho do časopisu *Morning Chronicle*. Zveřejnění těchto doposud neznámých příspěvků podstatně přispěje k hlubšímu hodnocení kritické a recensentské činnosti velkého realisty a vývoje jeho názorů na literaturu a umění během významného období jeho života, kdy dozrával jeho světový názor pod vlivem bouřlivých společenských událostí čtyřicátých let a kdy jeho umělecký vývoj dospěl ke svému vyvrcholení.

V první části studie autorka podává celkové zhodnocení Thackerayových příspěvků do časopisu *Morning Chronicle* a rozebírá jejich širší význam pro thackerayovské badatele. Zdůrazňuje, že všechny tyto příspěvky, politické reportáže, výtvarné kritiky i knižní recenze, svědčí o Thackerayově intimní znalosti politického a společenského života, literatury a výtvarného umění Anglie jeho doby, historického vývoje anglické společnosti a jejich kulturních tradic. S hlediska Thackerayova ideového a uměleckého vývoje v letech 1844—1848 zaslouží zmínky i jeho reportáže chartistických schůzí, i když nespádají přímo do rámce studie. Autorka ukazuje, jak Thackerayova reportérská činnost pro *Morning Chronicle* přispěla k vývoji jeho názorů na anglickou společenskou tímu, že mu umožnila poznat těžké životní podmínky anglického lidu a jeho boj za zlepšení těchto podmínek — chartistické hnutí — z vlastní zkušenosti. I když Thackerayovy reportáže nepatří mezi jeho nejlepší příspěvky, neodhalují žádná nová fakta a nejsou výrazně poznamenány jeho uměleckou individualitou, jejich význam nelze přehlížet. Přispívají k rozšíření našich znalostí o Thackerayově politickém vývoji těsně před závažnou změnou jeho pohledu na život a společnost, která u něho nastala po porážce chartismu v Anglii a revoluce v Evropě a která se hrála rozhodující úlohu ve vývoji jeho umění a kritiky po roce 1848.

Autorka se dále stručně zabývá hodnocením Thackerayových výtvarných kritik, upozorňuje na některé kritikovy výroky o výtvarném umění, pokud osvětlují jeho pojetí literatury v tomto období a shrnuje některé základní principy a charakteristické rysy, které má Thackerayova výtvarná kritika společně s jeho kritikou literární.

V hlavní části první kapitoly autorka podává nejprve celkové hodnocení Thackerayových knižních recenzí a zdůrazňuje, že obsahují mnoho zajímavého a podnětného pro thackerayovské badatele, protože z nich jasněji než ze Thackerayových románů vyplývá jeho postoj k závažným politickým a společenským problémům doby. Zvláštní pozornost věnuje autorka kritické hodnotě těchto recenzí, které považuje za nejspěšnější konkrétní Thackerayovy koncepce literární kritiky v období do roku 1848. Konfrontací Thackerayovy kritické teorie s jeho kritickou praxí v *Morning Chronicle* dochází k závěru, že Thackeray v tomto časopise vystupuje jako kritik usilující o objektivní posouzení literárního díla. Dovede náležitě ocenit kladné stránky tvůrčí metody autora, avšak neupadá do nekritické chvály, neváhá také použít ostrých zbraní své satiry a ironie, avšak nikdy jich nezneužívá. Jako hlavní kladné rysy Thackerayovy recensentské práce pro časopis *Morning Chronicle* autorka vyzvedává zejména jeho schopnost rozpoznat a vyjádřit význam recensované knihy pro čtenářskou obec a společnost, a jeho neochvějnou lásku k pravdě. Zdůrazňuje, že Thackeray hledal objektivní základ pro své hodnocení literárního díla vždy v samé skutečnosti, v té oblasti reálného života, která je v díle popisována a zobrazována.

V závěru prvé části článku autorka věnuje pozornost některým slabým stránkám Thackerayovy recensentské práce pro uvedený časopis. Ukazuje, že některé slabiny známé z kritikovy předešlé činnosti přetrvávají i zde, zejména jeho sklon k spontánním výlevům osobních sympatií a antipatií. Kritikova impulzivnost ho však tentokrát nevede k jednostrannému a zaujatému posuzování, jak tomu bylo často v jeho dřívějších pracích — své sympatie a antipatie dovede Thackeray vždy podepřít reálnými a věrohodnými důvody. Odůvodnění zvýšené úrovně Thackerayovy kritiky v časopise *Morning Chronicle* je třeba především hledat v jeho vyzrálém pohledu na

život a literaturu a ve vyhraněném kritickém standardu, který Thackeray vypracoval a používal v období vyvrcholení svého vývoje uměleckého.

Druhá část článku je věnována podrobnému rozboru konkrétní aplikace Thackerayových kritických zásad v jeho hodnocení několika románů a povídek některých současných spisovatelů. Autorka úvodem k této části podrobněji rozebírá Thackerayovy teoretické úvahy o tom, co má či nemá být materiálem romanopisce, který hodlá zobrazit současnou skutečnost, a jakým způsobem má být vybraný materiál v románech zpracováván. Thackeray, který si vždy hluboce uvědomoval velký poznávací význam literatury, vyjadřuje v těchto svých úvahách znepokojení nad tím, že někteří současní romanopisci v Anglii zacházejí příliš daleko ve snaze přispět k prohloubení čtenářova poznání skutečnosti, zatažují svá díla zbytečným „morálním balastem“ a místo románů a povídek píší vědecké, politické či náboženské pamflety a manifesty. Autorka si podrobněji všímá zejména Thackerayova tvrzení, na první pohled velmi kacířského, že materiálem romanopisce nemají být současné politické a společenské problémy, jako na příklad postavení pracujících mas a vztah mezi vykořisťovanými a vykořisťovateli. Osvětluje důvody, které Thackerayho k tomuto tvrzení vedly a na základě nich dochází k závěru, že protestoval spíše proti nesprávnému způsobu, jakým někteří současní romanopisci tuto tematiku zpracovávali, než proti jejich výběru jako takovému. V dalším autorka rozebírá konkretisaci těchto teoretických úvah v Thackerayově hodnocení některých tzv. politických románů, zejména románů Benjaminu Disraeliho *Coningsby* a *Sybil*, z něhož jeho názor na místo současných politických a společenských problémů v literatuře vyplývá mnohem jasněji než z uvedených teoretických vývodů. Autorka zdůrazňuje, že Thackeray hodnotí politickou doktrinu propáganou Disraelim v těchto románech v zásadě správně a že správně je i jeho hodnocení kladů a slabín autorovy tvůrčí metody. Ve svých teoretických úvahách se Thackeray dopouští některých omylů (z nich autorka uvádí zejména jeho některé nepodložené výpady proti Dickensovi a jeho názor, že spisovatel má stát stranou současných společenských zápasů), jeho konkrétní hodnocení tzv. politických románů však obsahuje řadu závažných kritických soudů, které v mnohém zůstávají pravdivé a platné až do dnešní doby. Za hlavní přínos Thackerayovy kritiky tzv. politických románů autorka článku považuje další propracování kritikovy realistické koncepce literatury jako pravdivého zpodobení skutečnosti.

Na principech realistického pojetí literatury jsou založeny i zbývající Thackerayovy recenze současných literárních děl, z nichž autorka vybírá jako nejpozoruhodnější recenze Dickensovy vánoční povídky *The Cricket on the Hearth*, Jerroldovy humorné knížky *Mrs. Caudle's Curtain Lectures*, vánoční povídky paní Gorové *The Snow Storm* a její knihy *Sketches of English Character*. Recenze povídky Dickensovy a Jerroldovy umožnily Thackeraymu, jak autorka podrobně dokumentuje, hlouběji propracovat vlastní koncepci tvorby charakterů v literárním díle. Thackeray vždy vysoko hodnotil ty romanopisce, kteří ve svých dílech dokázali vytvořit životní charaktery, které čtenář přijímá jako skutečné lidské bytosti, do jejichž osudů se dokáže vžít a v jejichž existenci věří. Schopnost obdařit literární postavy takovou životností připisuje Thackeray Jerroldovi; postavy Dickensovy vánoční povídky nejsou podle jeho názoru životně pravdivé, nýbrž nepravděpodobné a zveličené. Thackerayova recenze Dickensovy vánoční povídky je novým dokladem o jeho současně kritickém i obdivném postoji k velkému současníkovi. Přestože Thackeray nedokázal odhalit kořeny slabín Dickensovy tvůrčí metody v tomto díle, na něž poukázali již recenzenti povídky v chartistickém časopise „Severní Hvězda“ v jeho době, odvedl poctivou kritickou práci a jeho rozbor povídky obsahuje mnoho cenných postřehů, které neztrácejí na své hodnotě ani dnes.

Ve svém rozboru Thackerayových recenzí děl paní Gorové autorka článku podtrhává velký význam, který měla četba těchto knih pro Thackerayův umělecký růst v době, kdy vytvářel své mistrovské dílo *Trh marnosti*. Paní Gorová v nich zobrazila tu oblast společenského života současné Anglie, která byla středem Thackerayova tvůrčího zájmu, a její naivní a neuhlazené popisy způsobu života vyšších společenských tříd potvrdily Thackerayovy vlastní závěry o tomto velkém trhu marnosti.

Autorka článku dochází k závěru, že Thackerayova recenze uvedených děl současné anglické literatury jsou novým přesvědčivým dokumentem o progresivním vývoji jeho kritických schopností a dalším rozvoji jeho realistického pojetí literatury. Základním kritickým měřítkem, které Thackeray při hodnocení uvedených děl používá, je konfrontace literárního obrazu s tou oblastí života, která je v něm zpodobena a stupeň pravdivosti tohoto zpodobení. Další přínos Thackerayovy literární

kritiky v časopise *Morning Chronicle* vidí autorka článku v kritikově podrobném rozboru jednotlivých aspektů tvůrčí metody romanopisce, jimiž se zabývá v nebhývalé šíři a hloubce. I když Thackerayovy literárně kritické příspěvky nejsou prosty nedostatků, tyto jsou nesporně vyváženy jejich klady a přednostmi. Autorka článku se ztotožňuje s názorem Gordona N. Raye, který Thackerayovy příspěvky do časopisu *Morning Chronicle* hodnotí jako novinářskou kritiku vysoké úrovně, která má značnou trvalou hodnotu. Spolu s nově objevenými politickými reportážemi, které nás podněcují k dalšímu, hlubšímu studiu Thackerayova politického vývoje v roce 1848 a jeho výtvarnými kritikami, které doplňují naše dosavadní znalosti o jeho pojetí výtvarného umění, Thackerayovy knižní recenze, zejména recenze beletristických děl, se nepochybně stanou nepostradatelnou součástí studia každého thackerayovského badatele i milovníka Thackerayova umění.

ЛИТЕРАТУРНО-КРИТИЧЕСКАЯ ДЕЯТЕЛЬНОСТЬ В. М. ТЕККЕРЕЯ В ЖУРНАЛЕ „МОРНИНГ КРОНИКЛ“ (1844 — 1848).

Во вступлении статьи автор положительно оценивает заслуживающую признания издательскую деятельность американского исследователя Гордона Н. Рейе, последним результатом которой является первое полное издание всех до сих пор идентифицированных статей В. М. Теккерея в журнале „Морнинг Кроникл“. Опубликование этих до сих пор неизвестных статей вносит существенный вклад в дело глубокой оценки критической и рецензентской деятельности великого реалиста и развитие его взглядов на литературу и искусство в течение значительного периода его жизни, когда созревало его мировоззрение под влиянием бурных общественных событий 40-х гг. и когда его художественное творчество достигло своей вершины.

В первой части работы автор дает общую оценку статей Теккерея для журнала „Морнинг Кроникл“ и разбирает их широкое значение для исследователей творчества Теккерея. Автор подчеркивает, что все эти статьи, политические репортажи, художественно-критические и книжные рецензии свидетельствуют о близком знакомстве Теккерея с политической и общественной жизнью, литературой и искусством Англии того периода, историческим развитием английского общества и его культурной традиции. С точки зрения идейного и художественного развития Теккерея в 1844—1848 гг. заслуживают внимания и его репортажи чартистских событий, хотя они и выходят из пределы данной статьи. Автор указывает, как репортёрская деятельность Теккерея для „Морнинг Кроникл“ вносит вклад в дело развития его взгляда на английское общество тем, что дала ему возможность узнать тяжёлые жизненные условия английского народа и его борьбу за улучшение этих условий — чартистское движение — на собственном опыте. Хотя репортажи Теккерея не относятся к числу наилучших статей, не дают новых фактов и не являются выразительным отражением его индивидуальности, их значение нельзя недооценивать. Они вносят вклад в дело расширения наших знаний о политическом развитии Теккерея непосредственно перед серьезным изменением его взгляда на жизнь и общество, которое настает у него после поражения чартизма в Англии и революции в Европе и которое сыграло решающую роль в развитии его искусства и критики после 1848 г.

Автор далее кратко занимается оценкой художественной критики Теккерея, обращает внимание на некоторые критические замечания об искусстве, когда освещает его понимание литературы в этот период, и включает некоторые основные принципы и характерные черты, которые имеет художественная критика Теккерея совместно с его литературной критикой.

В главной части первой главы автор дает прежде всего общую оценку книжных рецензий Теккерея и подчеркивает, что они содержат много интересного и творческого для теккереевских исследователей, потому что в них яснее, чем в романах Теккерея, выплывает его отношение к важным политическим и общественным проблемам. Особое внимание автор уделяет критической оценке этих рецензий, которые считает самыми успешными в теккереевской концепции литературной критики в период перед 1848 г. Сопоставление критической теории и практики Теккерея в „Морнинг Кроникл“ приводит к выводу, что в этом журнале Теккерей выступает как критик, стремящийся к объективной оценке литературного творчества. Он умеет справедливо оценить положительные стороны творческого метода автора, но не нисходит до некритической похвалы, не колеблется в использовании острого оружия своей сатиры и иронии, но этим оружием никогда не злоупотребляет. Главной положительной чертой теккереевской рецензентской работы для журнала „Морнинг Кроникл“ автор выдвигает особенно его способность распознать и выразить значение рецензируемой книги для читателей и общества и его непоколебимую любовь к правде. Автор подчеркивает, что Теккерей искал объективные основы для своей оценки литературного произведения всегда в самой действительности в тех областях реальной жизни, которая описана и отражена в произведении.

В заключение первой части статьи автор уделяет внимание некоторым слабым сторонам рецензентской деятельности Теккерея для упомянутого журнала. Автор указывает, что некоторые слабости, известные из предыдущей критической деятельности продолжаются и здесь, особенно его склонность к спонтанным влияниям личных симпатий и антипатий.

Критическая импульсивность его на этот раз не ведёт к одностороннему и предвзятому суждению, как это часто видим в ранних работах — свои симпатии и антипатии Теккерей всегда подтверждает реальными и достоверными доводами. Обоснование высокого уровня критики Теккерей в журнале „Морнинг Кроникл“ необходимо прежде всего рассматривать в его созревшем взгляде на жизнь и литературу и определившемся критическом стандарте, которые Теккерей выработал и использовал на вершине своего художественного развития.

Другая часть статьи посвящена подробному разбору конкретной реализации критических принципов Теккерей в его оценке нескольких романов и повестей некоторых современных писателей. Автор во введении к этой части подробно разбирает теоретические рассуждения о том, что должно и что не должно быть материалом романистов, которые намереваются изобразить современную действительность, и каким способом должен быть разработан в романе подобранный материал. Теккерей, который всегда подчёркивал огромное познавательное значение литературы, высказывает в этих своих рассуждениях беспокойство тем, что некоторые современные романисты в Англии заходят слишком далеко в надежде оказать помощь в деле углубления читательского познания действительности, загружают свои произведения излишним „моральным балластом“ и вместо романов и повестей пишут научные, политические или религиозные памфлеты и манифесты. Автор уделяет подробное внимание главным образом утверждению Теккерей, на первый взгляд довольно-таки еретическому, что материалом романиста не должны быть политические и общественные проблемы, как, например, положение трудящихся масс и отношения между эксплуататорами и эксплуатируемыми. Автор освещает доводы, которые привели Теккерей к этому утверждению, и на основе их приходит к заключению, что он протестует скорее против неверного способа, каким разрабатывали эту тематику некоторые современные романисты, нежели против их выбора как такового. В дальнейшем автор разбирает конкретизацию этих теоретических положений в теккереевской оценке некоторых так называемых политических романов, особенно романа Бенджамина Дизраэли „Квинси и Сибил“, из которой намного яснее вытекает его взгляд на место современных политических и общественных проблем в литературе, чем из приведённых теоретических выводов. Автор подчёркивает, что Теккерей оценивает политическую доктрину, пропагандируемую Дизраэли в этих романах, правильно и что правильной является его оценка положительных сторон и слабостей авторского творчества метода. В своих теоретических рассуждениях Теккерей допускает некоторое оговорки (из них автор приводит особенно его некоторые необоснованные выпады против Дикенса и его взгляда, неприемлемые с сегодняшней точки зрения, что писатель должен встать на позиции современной общественной борьбы), но его конкретная оценка так называемых политических романов содержит ряд важных критических суждений, которые во многом остаются правильными и действенными и до сегодняшнего периода. Главным вкладом критики Теккерей так называемых политических романов автор статьи считает дальнейшую разработку критиком реалистической концепции литературы, как правдивого изображения действительности.

На принципах реалистического понимания литературы основаны и остальные рецензии Теккерей на современные литературные произведения, из которых автор выбирает, как самые замечательные для рецензии, рождественские рассказы Дикенса „Сверчок на печке“, юмористические книжки Джерольда „Супружеские натации госпожи Коул“, рождественские рассказы госпожи Гор „Снежная буря“ и её книги „Скетчи английского характера“. Рецензии рассказов Дикенса и Джерольда дали возможность Теккерей, как подробно доказывает автор, глубже разработать собственные концепции создания характера в литературном произведении. Теккерей всегда высоко оценивает тех романистов, которые в своих произведениях сумели создать жизненные характеры, которые читатель воспринимает как действительные человеческие лица, в судьбу которых живётся и верит в их существование. Способность наделять фигуры такой жизненностью Теккерей приписывает Джерольду; фигуры рождественских рассказов Дикенса не являются, с его точки зрения, жизненно правдивыми, естественными, правдоподобными, а преувеличенными. Рецензирование Теккереем рождественских рассказов Дикенса является новым доказательством его одновременно критического и восторженного отношения к великому современнику. Автор статьи подчёркивает, что Теккерей удивительно хорошо понял основные слабости творческого метода Дикенса в этом произведении и посвятил ему критическую работу. Так как он не сумел вскрыть корни этих недостатков, на что указывали рецензенты рассказов в чартистском журнале „Северная звезда“ в его время, его критический разбор содержит много ценных наблюдений, которые не потеряли своего значения и до сегодняшнего дня.

В своём разборе рецензий Теккерей на приведённые произведения автор статьи тов.

Горова подчёркивает большое значение, которое имело чтение этих книг для творческого роста Теккерея в период, когда он создал своё мастерское произведение „Ярмарка тщеславия“. Тов. Горова изображает ту область общественной жизни современной Англии, которая была предметом творческого интереса Теккерея, и наивные и неотшлифованные описания способа жизни высших общественных классов подтвердили личные выводы Теккерея об этой большой ярмарке тщеславия.

Автор статьи приходит к выводу, что рецензии Теккерея на приведенные произведения современной ему английской литературы являются новым убедительным документом прогрессивного развития его критических способностей и дальнейшего углубления его реалистического понимания литературы. Основной критической меркой, которой пользовался Теккерей при оценке приведенных литературных произведений, является сопоставление литературного образа с той областью жизни, которая в нём изображена, и степень правдивости этого изображения. Дальнейший вклад литературной критики Теккерея в журнале „Морнинг Кроникл“ автор статьи видит в подробном разборе Теккереем отдельных аспектов творческого метода романиста, которыми критик занимается необычайно широко и глубоко. И хотя литературно-критические статьи Теккерея не лишены недостатков, это сполна уравновешивается приведенными достоинствами и преимуществами. Автор статьи сходится со взглядами Гордона Н. Рейя, который оценивает статьи Теккерея в журнале „Морнинг Кроникл“ как журналистскую критику высокого уровня, которая имеет непреходящее значение. Вместе со вновь открытыми политическими репортажами, которые нас побуждают к дальнейшему, более глубокому изучению политического развития Теккерея в 1848 г. и его художественной критики, которые дополняют наши знания о его понимании искусства, книжные рецензии Теккерея, особенно рецензии беллетристических произведений, несомненно станут незаменимой составной частью работы каждого исследователя творчества Теккерея и любителя его искусства.

Перевела Л. Ондраёва.

